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**OCCUPATIONAL WELL-BEING OF INTERNATIONAL
BUSINESS TRAVELERS**

The Role of Leader-Member exchange and Travel Days

Master's Thesis in
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ABSTRACT

International business has increased enormously during the past years due to advanced communication technology, falling trade barriers and highly developed transportation. This transformation in business has created a new and ever increasing group of employees called international business travellers (IBTs). It is presumed that the nature and demand for an employee's work is influenced by this increase in their respective mobility, having therefore an effect also on an individual's experienced occupational well-being.

This master's thesis focuses on examining the effect of leader-member exchange (LMX), which refers to the quality of the relationship between the leader and the follower, on IBTs' work engagement (vigor as a core component). Also, the effect of traveling days on IBTs' burnout (job exhaustion as a core component) is studied. The theoretical framework is based on job demands-resources (JD-R) model and thus, both health impairment and motivational processes are studied.

Data used in this study was collected from a larger research process conducted by the University of Vaasa. Therefore, this thesis focuses on reanalysing a part of that data, which was collected for a study examining IBTs' psychological well-being. The data (N=436) was originally gathered with a web-based questionnaire and all the participants are employed by a Finnish software and services company. The results gained through correlation analysis and regression coefficient showed that high quality LMX, viewed as job resource, predicted vigor and decreased exhaustion among IBTs. In addition, it was noted that travel days, seen as job demand, predicted exhaustion, but had no influence on vigor.

The findings indicate that organizations should pay greater attention to the complex nature of mobile work and to the pressure under which IBTs operate. Moreover, organizations should help supervisors and IBTs to establish high quality LMX relationships, and over time, both employers and employees will benefit.

KEYWORDS: occupational well-being, leader-member exchange, international business traveller, work engagement, burnout

1. INTRODUCTION

Occupational well-being is a factor that helps employees to get through their work. It means that the work is safe, healthy and meaningful. When occupational well-being increases, so does productivity. This in turn enhances commitment to work and reduces the number of sickness absence (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 2014). In addition, employees' well-being has been widely studied and it has been discovered to be linked to organizational performance (Mäkelä, Viitala, Tanskanen, Sääntti & Uotila 2013: 2; Vanhala & Kotila 2006; Vanhala & Tuomi 2006). Mäkelä et al. (2013: 21-22) state that occupational well-being forms from the physical, psychological and social abilities of an employee. Together with the working environment they create the basis for employee's well-being.

Occupational well-being can be studied from two different perspectives. Lack of well-being describes the negative approach to research, whereas the experience of well-being presents the positive approach. Previously, especially the negative side has raised the interests of researchers and the field of occupational well-being has largely concentrated on negative experiences, such as stress and burnout, for example. Relatively few studies on employee well-being focus on the positive viewpoint of the concept. As stated by Hakanen (2009), the various problems and threats of work are well known and studied, but only little research has been done over the positive work psychology and its theories and models.

However, during the last decade positive psychology has also raised its awareness among the studies about worker's well-being (Mäkelä et al. 2013: 21; Hakanen 2009: 8; Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Romá and Bakker 2002: 71; Hyrkkänen & Vartiainen 2005: 34). In addition to the fact that positive approach may enable organizations to prevent problems from happening, it also gives managers an opportunity to change organizational patterns, which have earlier concentrated on work related difficulties, such as burnout and bullying. In this study both negative (job exhaustion as a core component of burnout) and positive (vigor as a core component of work engagement) variables of occupational well-being are examined.

Leading occupational well-being is a key challenge for today's managers. It is the goal for occupational health care as well, and its obligation is to ensure and enhance employees' ability to work and experience well-being. Work surroundings and modus operandi have developed and changed due to burgeoning technology, for example, which enables working in varying hours and places. (Hyrkkänen & Vartiainen 2005: 31-32.)

International business has increased enormously during the past years due to advanced communication technology, falling trade barriers and highly developed transportation (Economist Intelligence Unit 2015; The Economist 2015). This transformation in business has created a new and ever increasing group of employees called international business travellers (IBTs). Employees have been sent abroad on business trips in the past as well but the size of the scale has now ballooned (Bergbom, Vesala, Leppänen, Sainio, Mukala & Smolander 2011: 10). In Finland alone the number of business trips abroad involving overnighing in the destination in 2015 was 1.7 million while the same number in 2010 was 1.2 million and the number has varied between 974,000 (2009) and 1,951,000 (2012) (Official Statistics of Finland 2015 a). In addition, in 2015 work-related same-day trips abroad numbered 229,000 and increased by 47 per cent compared to 2014 (Official Statistics of Finland 2015 b). On top of that, in 2015 the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) reported firms spending \$1.25 trillion on sending employees on business trips. Now that the business has started to recover after the financial crisis, organizations are looking to grow by sending their staff abroad to establish new deals. In general, firms are increasing their travel budgets. (The Economist 2015.)

It is presumed that the increase in employee's mobility strongly influences the demands of the work and thus, also the experienced well-being of those traveling individuals. The default is that IBT's work also involves co-working with others. Therefore, traveling creates challenges to the traveller his/herself but also to the colleagues and the supervisor. The rise of mobile work, even though concerning only a part of personnel, affects the need to organize and lead the distributed work and employees in new ways. (Hyrkkänen & Vartiainen 2005: 32; 45.)

Despite their increasing number, IBTs are considered to be a neglected human resource in organizations. However, at the same time they play a significant role in knowledge transfer, performance monitoring, control and sales, for instance (Welch, D., E., Welch,

L., S. & Worm, V. 2007; Mäkelä & Suutari 2015: 2). The earliest empirical findings on the connection between supervisor behavior and the well-being of employees originates from the late 1970s and afterwards it has been proved that the leader-member exchange (LMX) really has an influence on the occupational well-being (Gilbreath & Benson 2007; Nortio 2015: 14).

The theory of LMX forms from the idea that leaders develop different types of exchange relationships with their subordinates. Every relationship is unique (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga 1975) and they vary in quality (Graen & Uhl-Bien 1995). As Thomas and Lankau (2009: 419-420) describe in their article, high-quality LMX is characterized by higher levels of mutual trust, liking, respect, interaction and support than low-quality LMX. Workers with high-quality LMX “tend to receive greater organizational and job-related information, greater job direction, and higher objective performance ratings”. Thus, high-quality LMX can be seen as job resource.

Since IBTs are an increasingly important resource for organizations and since leader behaviour significantly affects the well-being of employees (Gilbreath & Benson 2007; Nortio 2015: 14), it is important to study the connection between these two factors. As far as is known this connection has not been under research earlier, and thus it is an interesting field of study. Moreover, IBTs operate in stressful work environment, which may cause negative consequences to the working individual but also to the organization (Welch et al. 2007). Therefore, it is essential to know how to reinforce the well-being of IBTs and if it can be done by using the facilitating role of LMX.

According to Schaufeli et al. (2002: 74) there are two underlying dimensions of work-related well-being: activation and identification. Activation ranges from exhaustion to vigor, and identification ranges from cynicism to dedication. Burnout originates from exhaustion (low activation) and cynicism (low identification), whereas engagement is characterized by vigor (high activation) and dedication (high identification). Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter (2001: 417) state that burnout is particularly related to job demands, such as work overload and emotional demands, and engagement, on the other hand, is more related to job resources, like job control, availability of feedback and learning opportunities.

This master's thesis utilizes the job demands-resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti 2007: 313) to study LMX and traveling days and how they relate to the two opposing variables of occupational well-being; work engagement (vigor as a core component) and burnout (job exhaustion as a core component). The preliminary aim for this master's thesis is to examine the connection between leader-member exchange and business traveller's occupational well-being. The objective of the thesis is to broaden the information about the relationship between leadership and business travellers, and to study whether good leadership can enhance the occupational well-being of business travellers. In addition, the connection between the days spent traveling and IBTs occupational well-being is studied. Thus, LMX is studied as a job resource and traveling days as a travel-specific job demand. This study proposes that the quality of exchange relationship between the leader and the subordinate, and the days spent traveling can have an influence on the levels of work engagement and burnout of the IBT subordinate.

The two research questions are:

“How does leader-member exchange influence the occupational well being of business travellers?”

and

“How do traveling days influence the occupational well being of business travellers?”

Objectives for this thesis are the following:

- To analyse the phenomena of leader-member exchange and occupational well-being in the form of work engagement and burnout in order to increase the basic understanding of the subject.
- To explore the influence of leader-member exchange and traveling days to work engagement and burnout on the basis of JD-R model.
- To empirically explore how the leader-member exchange and the traveling days affect the work engagement and burnout of business travellers.

2. OCCUPATIONAL WELL-BEING OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS TRAVELERS

Even though electronic communication has largely increased during the recent years, the need for face-to-face meetings and the number of international assignments has remained roughly the same. Companies require personal visits to foreign destinations for various reasons and the need for internal consistency drives organizations towards international movement. (Welch et al. 2007)

Welch, Welch and Lawrence (2007) suggest that there is a trend towards the use of non-standard international assignments, such as short-term, virtual, contractual and commuter assignments. This is due to the costly structure of traditional expatriation, which can be highly difficult and expensive to support. Also the changed nature of society brings its own addition to the increased immobility of employees. Dual-career couples, aged parents and single-parent families along with changing career arrangements and priorities create novel needs for IBTs. IBTs are employees whose working role involves international visits to foreign units, markets or the like. According to Welch et al. (2007) business travel is a necessary part of an IBT's work, and for some it has evolved almost as a career itself. As a part of their work IBTs spend a lot of time in airplanes and airports, work long hours and undertake complex tasks often in challenging or even dangerous destinations. As cited by Mäkelä and Kinnunen (2016) these job demands may be stressful and affect IBTs' well-being.

Nonetheless, Welch et al. (2007) stated in their study that IBTs are often a neglected human resource, which organizations tend to ignore and focus merely on supporting traditional expatriate assignments. Therefore, it may be that IBTs are not given as much resources as they would need in order to experience well-being at work. However, IBTs play an important role in areas such as sales, knowledge transfer, control and performance monitoring. While globalization is diminishing the meaning of country borders, organizations send their employees abroad even more frequently. Thus, it is also likely that IBTs' role in organizations will become even more important in the future (Economist Intelligence Unit 2010).

The Research and Education Centre Synergos (Manka, Hakala, Nuutinen & Harju 2010: 7-8) demonstrates how occupational well-being is nowadays understood more extensively and it involves factors from the organization, work community and the employee him-/herself. Thus, occupational well-being is based on good leadership, organizing the work, rules of the work community, capabilities of the employee, interactive *modus operandi* in the organization and positive organizational culture. According to recent research, possibility to influence one's own work and training, meaningfulness of the work, encouraging and consistent leadership, feedback, and mutual trust increase occupational well-being. All these factors are also important to IBTs who often work far away from the office and the organizational orbit.

Stress is often involved in international assignments and it can contribute to negative physical, social and also emotional outcomes for an individual (Welch et al. 2007). Mäkelä and Kinnunen (2016: 2) indicate that research on IBTs is on rise and that simultaneously only a few earlier studies have examined IBTs' psychological well-being. Their study shows how IBTs working environment is characterized by high workload and work pressure during the business trip; IBTs have longer working hours than the employees working locally and they also experience time pressure and a need to rush the work. In addition, unexpected delays are common problems occurring during a business travel, which may put pressure on planned schedules and tasks. Health and safety issues, changing time zones, and a need to use a foreign language can also jeopardize IBTs well-being. Moreover, high climatic and cultural contrast between the traveller's home country and the destination have reported to have a greater risk of illness (Patel 2011).

Härkkönen and Vartiainen (2005: 42-44) state that the outcomes of occupational well-being are not always a simple continuum. This is due to the fact that it is possible to experience well-being and high workload simultaneously. People react to excessive workload on three levels; psychical, physical and on behavioural level. This means that the outcomes of occupational well-being can also be seen on these three levels. Positive outcomes are, for example, satisfaction with work and life, positive attitude, openness and interest, commitment and good occupational self-confidence, virility, drive, absorption, activity and capability. Alternatively, negative outcomes might manifest as tiredness, cynicism, anxiety, feeling of guilt or weakened self-esteem, amnesia, weakened

ability to concentrate, decline of initiative, rise of blood pressure, gastrointestinal infections, headache or backache, depression, lost of appetite, insomnia, increased alcohol consumption, changes in social relationships, absenteeism and postponing of responsibilities, for example.

Considering every aspect related to IBTs' working environment, it can be presumed that high job demands are characterizing IBTs work. Thus, it may be that also many negative well-being outcomes are related to IBTs. Therefore, organizations should focus more on supporting the IBTs with various resources.

2.1. The Job Demands-Resources model

The JD-R model is built on an idea that specific risk factors linked to job stress may categorize every occupation, and these factors can be divided into two general categories; job demands and job resources (Bakker et al. 2003). According to this model job demands are *“those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs”*. For instance, high work pressure, emotionally demanding interaction with client, or an unfavourable physical environment are examples of a job demand. Bakker and Demerouti (2007: 312) cite in their article that not always are job demands only negative, but they may turn into job stressors if meeting those demands requires high effort and if the employee is not able to recover adequately from them.

Job resources, on the other hand, refer to physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that are either/or *“functional in achieving work goals, reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs”*, and *“stimulate personal growth, learning, and development”*. Significant is that job resources are not only necessary to deal with job demands, but they are also important in their own right. In general, job resources may be derived from the level of organization at large (pay, career opportunities, job security, for example), the interpersonal and social relations (supervisor and colleague support, team spirit), the organization of work (role clarity and participation in decision making, for example), and from the level of the task itself (for

example, skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and performance feedback). (Bakker & Demerouti 2007: 312-313.)

One reason for the popularity of the JD-R model is its flexibility. It can be applied to all work environments and can be adapted to the specific occupation under examination. The model also proposes that all job characteristics can be modelled using the two different categories; job demands and job resources. Some job demands and resources are characterising almost every occupation (such as autonomy and pressure), but other are unique. For instance, physical demands are still found among construction workers and nurses, whereas cognitive demands are much common for scientists and engineer (Bakker, Demerouti & Sanz-Verger 2014: 399), and also for IBTs, for that matter.

Another premise for the JD-R model is that there are two different underlying psychological processes playing a role in the development of job strain and motivation. These processes are called the motivational process and the health impairment process. The Figure 1. demonstrates these two processes. Firstly, different job characteristics, which can be mental, emotional, physical, etc. become job demands if drove to excess. This in turn exhausts employees' mental and physical resources and may lead to drain of energy and to different health problems (health impairment process). On the other hand, other kind of job characteristics, such as autonomy, support and feedback from the supervisor, etc. serve as job resources and lead to positive organizational outcomes, like high work engagement, for instance (motivational process). (Bakker & Demerouti 2007: 313-314.)

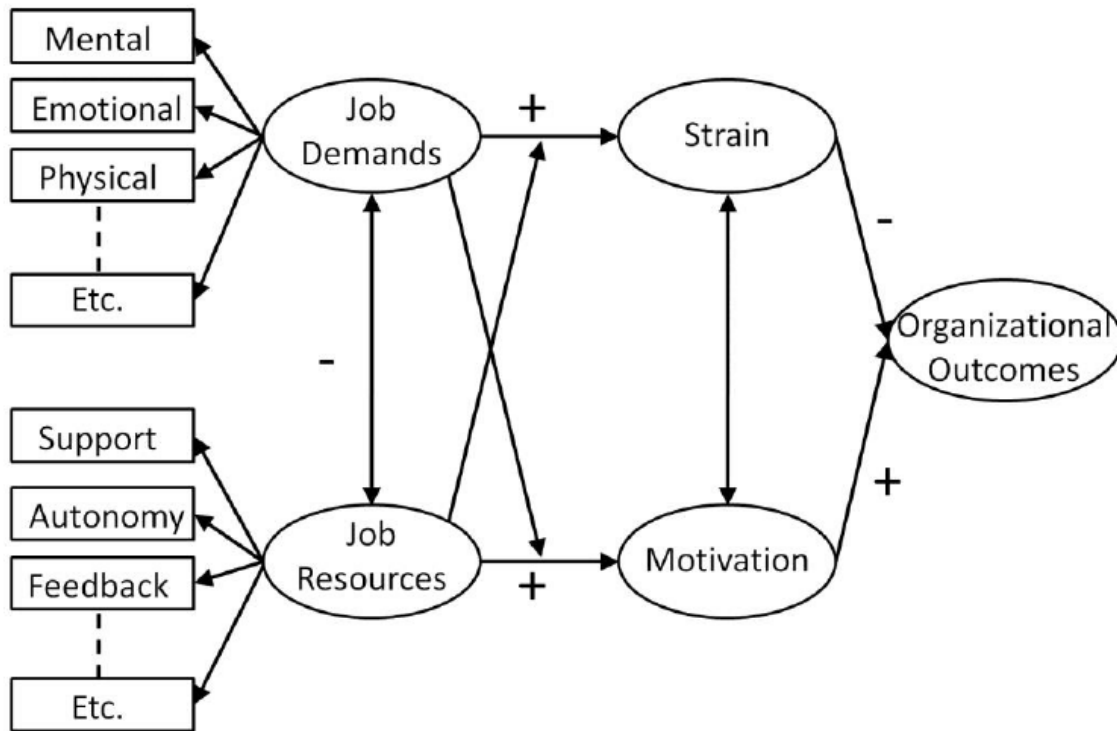


Figure 1. The Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker & Demerouti 2007: 313).

The JD-R model can clarify the meaning of both job resources and job demands regarding the work of IBTs as well. Considering the research question and the objectives of this study, this model is likely to bring more understanding to the subject.

2.2. Motivational process

In the motivational process of the JD-R model it is assumed that job resources have motivational potential and can lead to high work engagement, low cynicism, and excellent performance. In addition, job resources directly influence employees' growth, learning and development, meaning they have a natural motivational role, or they are serving as instruments to achieve work goals (Bakker & Demerouti 2007: 313). Thus, job resources are assumed to activate the motivational process, which in turn fosters willingness to dedicate one's efforts and capabilities to the work task (Chullen 2012: 13).

Human beings have basic needs, such as the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Feedback fosters learning and thereby increases job competence. Decision latitude and social support satisfy the need for autonomy and the need to belong. In this case job resources are fulfilling basic human needs. On the other hand, job resources may also serve in an extrinsic motivational role by providing work environments with many resources that foster the willingness to dedicate one's efforts and abilities to the work. This way the task in hand will be completed successfully and the work goal will be attained. In either case, whether it is through the satisfaction of basic human needs or through the achievement of work goals, job resources lead to engagement and their absence arouses cynical attitude towards work leading employees to feel used up and even burned up. (Bakker & Demerouti 2007: 314; Chullen 2012: 13.)

2.2.1. Leader-Member exchange as job resource

Leadership is one of the most discussed topics in the field of business and especially in Finland its connection to employee well-being and productivity has been studied by many researchers (Nortio 2015: 10-14; Kauppinen et al. 2013). In addition, leadership has been proved to have influence on organizational performance and success (Mäkelä et al. 2013: 2; Pettigrew, Woodman & Cameron 2001). It is commonly recognized that in the highly competed business world and in our performance driven society it is crucial for employees to feel appreciated and get acknowledgement from their supervisors (Hakanen 2004; Solomon 2010). However, organizations still lack the understanding of the full potential of LMX and its possibilities in companies (Mäkelä et al. 2013). Occupational well-being is also based on good leadership, meaning the goals of the organization are defined and they are transmitted to the personnel. When the employees are aware of the goals and aims of the company, and understand their own connection to them they are more motivated and committed to the organization. By investing in its personnel, their work and work community, and by combining their different needs, also occupational well-being is being developed productively. (Manka, Hakala, Nuutinen & Harju 2010: 9.)

Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) explained in their article how we still do not know what leadership really is and how it can be achieved. This is due to the fact that there are many varying theories that address different aspects of leadership but little cohesion among the

theories that tie them all together. The authors argue that traditional categorizations of leadership theories have concentrated merely on characteristics of the supervisor and how these characteristics make the leader either effective or ineffective in different situations. However, this conception does not acknowledge other levels of leadership, such as the follower and the relationship between the leader and the follower. Thus, LMX theory has evolved into one of the interesting and useful frameworks for examining “*hypothesized linkages between leadership processes and outcomes*” (Gerstner and Day 1997: 827).

The theory of LMX originates from the 1970s and has developed through that time into a concept that refers to the relationship between the leader and the follower (Schriesheim, Castro & Cogliser 1999; Liden, Sparrow & Wayne 1997). LMX is based on the idea that the level of these relationships vary from high to low (Graen & Uhl-Bien 1995) and that leaders rarely establish similar relationships with different subordinates (Dansereau et al. 1975). Consequently, LMX can be seen as a social exchange approach to leadership (Graen & Uhl-Bien 1995).

Typical for high-level LMX relationships are open knowledge transfer, delegation and trust-based interaction, whereas in low-level LMX relationships communication is merely concentrated on performing the work assignments and neither of the parties feel the high importance of the relationship (Mäkelä et al. 2013: 17).

In the public domain there are different approaches to the concept. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) argue that the leadership model of LMX is both transactional and transformational. This is due to its transactional social exchange that develops into transformational social exchange for those who are able to utilize its full potential. Basically it refers to the different levels of LMX. High LMX can be seen as transformational model, which occurs when the relationship evolves into partnership. Low or medium LMX, on the other hand, refers to transactional model between two acquaintances or strangers. If the relationship between the leader and subordinate is only about material exchange, the level of LMX is low and resembles more of “managership” or “supervision” than leadership.

The nature of LMX has proved to have significant influence on both organizations and individuals (Mäkelä et al. 2013: 16-17). For example, high level of LMX increases employees’ job satisfaction (Erdogan & Enders 2007), innovation, creativity (Basu &

Green 1997) and performance (Liden, Erdogan, Wayne & Sparrow, 2006). It also affects the employee turnover and work depression (Harris, Kacmar & Witt 2005). Moreover, as cited in Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti & Hetland (2012: 765), research has shown that LMX is negatively related to hindrance demands (so called “bad” demands, such as workload and time pressure, which may weaken employee’s health if they are not compensated with sufficient job resources) due to the fact that leaders in high-quality LMX relationships take away as many obstacles as possible preventing employees from not achieving their goals.

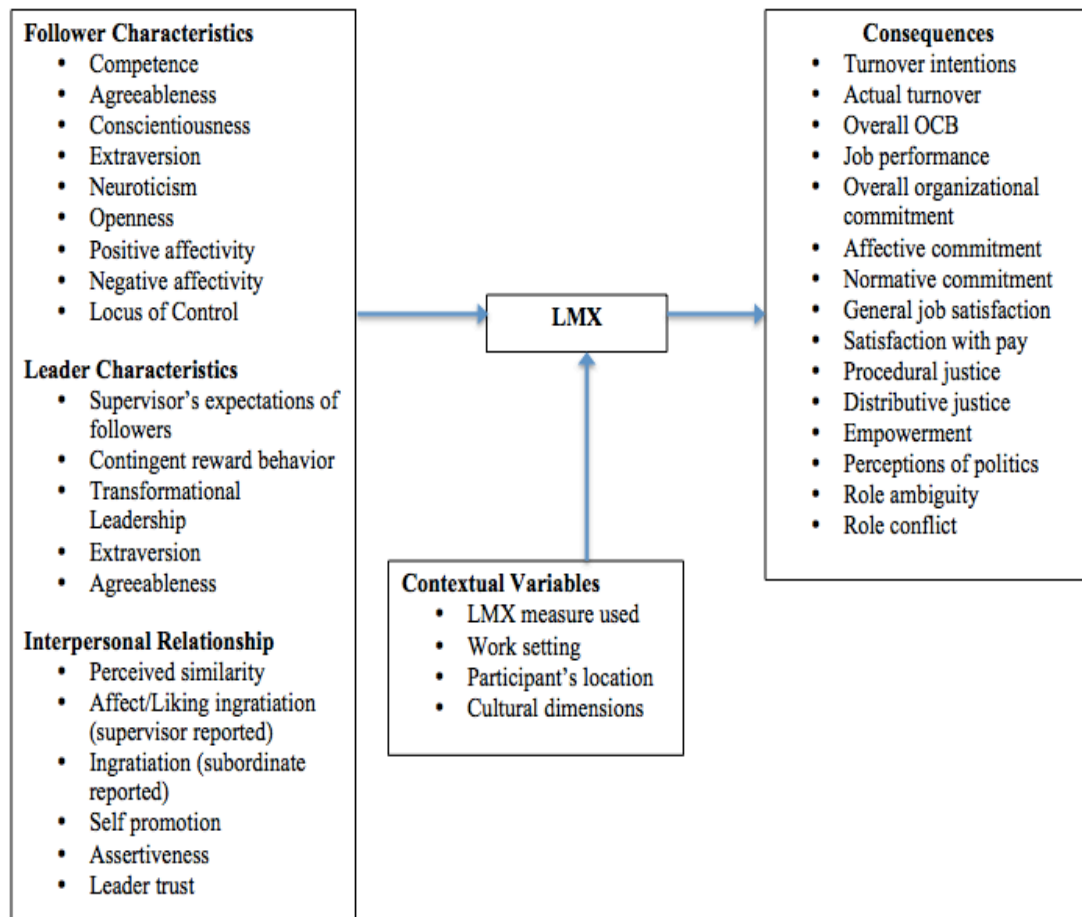


Figure 2. Leader-Member Exchange Antecedents and Consequences Theoretical Framework (Dulebohn et al. 2011: 3).

Dulebohn et al. (2011: 3-4) summarised LMX into a theoretical framework (Figure 2), which was designed to enhance understanding of the ways in which LMX mediates relationships between antecedents and outcomes in organisations. Follower characteristics, leader characteristics and interpersonal relationship variables influence LMX relationship quality, which in turn is somewhat moderated by contextual variables. The process is completed by consequences, which are the result of LMX.

Research has found that for some people it is easier to maintain high-quality LMX relationships than for others. In addition, LMX may also change over time (Gerstner and Day 1997: 838). Leader behaviors and perceptions explain the most variance in LMX, and especially leader expectations of follower success, contingent reward behaviour, and transformational leadership are the strongest variables predicting LMX quality. Contingent reward behaviour refers to providing feedback, rewards and recognition for accomplishments. Transformational leadership involves behaviors like articulating and modelling an appellant vision and encouraging the acceptance of group goals. These behaviors signal to followers that their leader is willing to put extra effort into the relationship, which likely encourages followers to reciprocate. However, it is the quality of LMX relationship that directly affects the outcomes. Followers may react differently to different leadership styles and thus it is the complex interaction between the leader and the follower that determines the key outcomes. (Dulebohn et al. 2011: 24-26.)

The study made by Agarwal, Datta, Blake-Beard & Bhargava (2012: 220-221), on the other hand, highlights the importance of an immediate leader in fostering engagement, which again influences innovative work behaviour and turnover intentions. The study found that the quality of LMX influences engagement levels and that work engagement relates positively to innovative work behaviour and negatively to turnover intentions. Work engagement was also found to have a mediating role to the relationship between LMX and innovative work behaviour.

Due to the nature of IBT's work it can be presumed that high level of LMX may be beneficial for IBT's occupational well-being. Earlier studies have found that social support can be an important predictor of occupational well-being and job satisfaction. Mäkelä, De Cieri and Mockaitis (2015: 182) state that social support can be drawn from different sources, such as from immediate supervisor, family member, the community

one lives in, and online, for example. The study conducted by Mäkelä et al. (2015: 189) found that regarding work satisfaction the support from the family proved to be more effective for IBTs than the support received from the supervisor. More precisely, no significant relationship was found between supervisor support and satisfaction with work-related travel.

However, another study on IBTs psychological well-being found that highly rated supportive HR practices were positively linked to vigor and satisfaction with business travelling. The study also found that supportive HR practices were buffering against job exhaustion when experiencing high levels of risk with travel destinations (Mäkelä & Kinnunen 2016). Therefore, it is important to study whether LMX could also have a significant role in the context of IBT's occupational well-being.

Even though prior research does not unequivocally support LMX as a job resource, it is still used as a variable in this study. It is a relatively good measurer of leadership satisfaction among followers and may therefore be seen as a valid variable also in this research. However, because the concept is not completely unambiguous, LMX is also studied as a job demand in order to clarify the research question versatility.

2.2.2. Work engagement as a result of motivational process

Hyrkkänen and Vartiainen (2005: 35) described Maslach and Leiter as the pioneers in the field of burnout and they determined well-being as the direct opposite to burnout. In other words, it was the lack of burnout and its symptoms, that is to say, high levels of energy, commitment to work, occupational self-confidence and sense of capability. However, the rise of positive psychology facilitated researchers to see occupational well-being as a broader concept than just the lack of ill-health. The concept of work engagement formed to give structure to positive well-being and according to Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma & Bakker (2002: 74) work engagement and burnout are two different and independent concepts that should also be studied independently and with different measures. Today, researchers are increasingly interested in scanning the effects of psychologically positive experiences, which can be observed through work engagement, for instance. (Mäkelä et al. 2013: 21; Hakanen 2009: 8; Schaufeli et al. 2002: 71; Hyrkkänen & Vartiainen 2005: 34.)

During the recent years work engagement has created a great amount of interest among researchers. However, despite its popularity and due to the newness of the concept and the fact that it often overlaps with other similar notions of work satisfaction, there is no widely accepted definition for work engagement (Cartwright & Cooper 2009: 161; Solomon 2010). Commitment and Organizational Citizen Behaviour (OCB) form the origin for engagement but according to Robinson, Parryman and Hayday (2004) neither commitment nor OCB fully reflect all the aspects of engagement (Solomon 2010).

Finnish Institute of Occupational health (2014 a) describes an employee experiencing work engagement to be energetic, dedicated, absorbed, persistent in setbacks and proud of his or her work. This kind of employee perceives work as meaningful, challenging and inspiring. Alternatively, the Institute for Employee Studies defines employee engagement as *“a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values.”* According to the definition *“an engaged employee is aware of business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organisation.”* Two-way relationship between the organization and the employee is the main characteristic for employee engagement and it is required in order to build and nurture engagement (Robinson 2007).

Hakanen (2009) states that as academic research on work engagement has developed in the 20th century and as the concept is new, the results should be observed with some reservation. The conducted studies show that factors, which reinforce work engagement can be divided into work related and non-work related factors. Hakanen separates these factors as work resources, contagiousness between employees, individual resources, recovery after work, and resources of home. He also lists possible positive outcomes for work engagement; attitudes and intention towards work and organization, initiative and voluntary participation, work performance, motivation for learning and further education, satisfaction for life and well-being in life in general, and lastly, health.

As a summary, according to Hakanen (2009) an employee who experiences work engagement is willing to work for his or her employer and continue the career in that organization longer than others. The work includes enough work resources that satisfy the employee's needs for independence, unity and feeling of doing well, which ensure that the employee enjoys the work. Thus, he or she wants to share the good feeling by

operating voluntarily and initiatively for the organization and the work community, and take responsibility for own performance. An employee experiencing work engagement also has a desire to learn and develop, but at the same time he or she does not work on the expense of health or life itself. Thereby, work engagement has proven to correlate negatively to depression (Hakanen, Schaufeli & Ahola 2008: 230), which reinforces its affect on occupational well-being.

On the contrary, employees who do not experience work engagement, or have lost it, do not give their best for their work, do nothing but what they are told to and want to resign earlier. In addition, those who still experience work engagement but are deprived of work resources, are most likely going to leave the organization and will not recommend it to anyone else either. (Hakanen 2009.)

Work engagement is characterized by three dimensions; vigor, dedication and absorption (Maslach et al. 2001: 417). Schaufeli et al. (2002: 74) describe vigor as high levels of energy and mental resilience when confronting difficulties at work. In other words, it reflects energy and flexibility, keenness to put in efforts, not being easily exhausted, and being determinant in the times of difficulties. The ones with high scores on vigor usually have a large amount of energy, enthusiasm and determination while working, whereas the ones scoring low on vigor have a lesser amount of energy, enthusiasm and determination regarding their work (Poornima 2016: 24-25). Dedication, on the other hand, is the strong involvement in one's work, accompanied by sense of enthusiasm and importance, and a feeling of pride and inspiration. Absorption refers to a pleasant state of total immersion in one's job, a flow where time passes by quickly and one is unable to detach oneself from the work (Maslach et al. 2001: 417).

By increasing the resources of work it is possible to enhance the experience of work engagement (Shimazu & Schaufeli 2009: 908). Moreover, it is also proved that the influence of job demands on work engagement is weaker than the influence of job resources (Hakanen 2009). According to Hakanen (2009) organizations should therefore concentrate on increasing job resources rather than diminishing job demands regarding work engagement. Thus, it is important to study the link between work engagement and LMX in the context of IBTs in order to examine if organizations can utilize LMX to improve IBTs' occupational well-being.

Hypothesis H1_a: High quality leader-member exchange relationship has a positive effect on the vigor of IBT.

2.3. Health impairment process

The second psychological process of the JD-R model is called the health impairment process or ill-health process. Researchers have found out that poorly designed jobs or prolonged job demands, such as work overload and emotional demands, exhaust employees' mental and physical resources and can therefore lead to exhaustion and other health problems (e.g. Demerouti et al. 2000; 2001). Individuals use so-called performance-protection strategies while being under the influence of environmental demands. "Performance protection is achieved through the mobilization of sympathetic activation (autonomic and endocrine) and/or increased subjective effort (use of active control in information processing)." While the activation or the effort increases the greater the physiological costs for the individual become. For example, the employee might start narrowing his/her attention, make risky choices and experience high levels of subjective fatigue. In the long run use of such a compensatory strategy may drain individual's energy and increase the stress from responding to demands, which eventually result in a breakdown. (Bakker & Demerouti 2007: 313; Chullen 2012: 13.)

2.3.1. Travel days as job demand

Job demands that are related to international business traveling have been examined only to some extent and a relatively few empirical findings have been gathered in this field. In general, stressful, short-term international assignments have been associated with high job demands and with reduced well-being over time (Mäkelä & Kinnunen 2016: 4) and one critical job demand related to mobile work is the intensity of travel. Particularly, how often IBT needs to travel and how long the trips last (Bergbom, Vesala, Leppänen, Sainio, & Mukala, 2011; Burkholder, Joines, Cunningham-Hill & Xu 2010). As Mäkelä (2016) states in her study, previously the frequency and duration of travel have been examined either using the number of trips and the number of traveling days or a combination of these two. Research using the combined effects of the frequency and duration of travel

has found that when the frequency and duration of trips increases so does the risk of ill health among travellers (Burkholder et al. 2010).

Moreover, previous research has found that the travel distance and the number of destinations correlate positively to complexity of mobile work (Hyrkkänen & Vartiainen 2005: 233). Especially physical workload, such as time differences and long working hours, the need to continually coordinate changes in location, and differences in work cultures, create challenges for employees who need to travel because of the nature of their work. In addition, changes in working time and schedules stretch the work day of an IBT and occasionally the work day may start very early in the morning or continue late in the evening. According to Hyrkkänen and Vartiainen (2005: 233), when a person is having a mobile job, to some extent work is present on every day of the week. Due to the required flexibility in working hours, IBTs often take their work home and this in turn might create new challenges when trying to balance the work-family life.

In addition to the long working hours, mobile and international work often involves distance relationships and/or absence from home (Mäkelä & Suutari 2015: 3). Research has found proof that family support is positively related to satisfaction with work-related international business travel. When comparing two different groups of IBTs the ones who received more support from their family were more satisfied with their work-related travel than the ones with lower levels of support. Mäkelä et al. (2015: 191) even state that regarding satisfaction with work-related travel family support is more important than the support gained from organizational resources and from the immediate supervisor.

However, traveling has been found to create conflicts between work and personal life (Saarenpää: 166-167; Mäkelä 2016). Sometimes it might be difficult for family members to feel comfortable with the IBT being away from home and working long hours even when not at the office or abroad. Dimberg, Striker, Nordanlycke-Yoo, Nagy, Mundt & Sulsky (2002) even argue that the length of trips is a critical factor for spouses, and that the spouses having a partner who travels longer periods, experience more often symptoms associated with negative psychological well-being than the spouses, whose partner spends less time away from home. Nevertheless, it is important for the IBT to feel that the travels are justified by their family.

Furthermore, a study examining the work-life interaction among IBTs found that extensive international business travel and especially the duration of that travel correlated positively to work-to-family conflict and work-to-life conflict. The same study also studied sleeping problems among IBTs and found that the duration of international business travel did not predict sleep problems directly over a period of one year, but did so indirectly through work-to-family conflict. (Mäkelä 2016) Moreover, spending more than 50 days traveling and away from home each year has been proved to influence family life through the build up of work that has to be taken care of by sacrificing family time (Hyrkkänen, Koroma, Muukkonen, Ojalehto, Rautio & Vartiainen 2011: 34).

Considering all the previous findings, it may be presumed that in the context of IBT, traveling days may hindrance occupational well-being and thus, advance the health impairment process and even lead to burnout.

2.3.2. Burnout as a result of health impairment process

Burnout can be defined *“as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with people”* (Hakanen, Schaufeli & Ahola 2008: 225). A rephrased term for this phenomenon is called an erosion of engagement (Schaufeli, Leiter & Maslach 2009: 215), which refers to the job that started out as as meaningful, important and challenging but has become unpleasant, unfulfilling and meaningless. The characteristics of engagement (energy, involvement and efficiency) turn into exhaustion, cynicism and ineffectiveness (Maslach et al. 2001: 416).

The term burnout originates from the 1970s, when it started to appear with some regularity, especially among people working in the human service. As a phenomena burnout has been identified by both practitioners and social commentators long before it started to rise the interest of researchers. All the research among this concept lead to a conceptualization of job burnout as a psychological syndrome, which appears as a response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job. (Maslach et al. 2001: 398.)

Finnish Institute of Occupational health (2014 b) describes burnout as a process, in which individual resources are depleted as a result of prolonged work stress. Accordingly, both work factors and individual factors influence the development of burnout. The risk

increases if the person has high personal goals, strong commitment, pronounced sense of duty, unattainable work goals and insufficient individual or organizational ways of coping in demanding situations. In 2000 2,5% of working Finns suffered from symptoms of burnout weekly and 25% monthly.

Burnout derives from three different dimensions. Emotional exhaustion refers to lack of energy and a feeling of emotional resources being fully consumed by work. Depersonalization or cynicism, which is the cynical and impersonal response toward work and causes a feeling of detachment from the work. Reduced personal accomplishment, on the other hand, refers to a tendency to negatively evaluate own work and to sense ineffectiveness and lack of personal accomplishment (Hakanen et al. 2008: 225; Maslach et al. 2001: 399). According to Maslach et al. (2001: 402-403) exhaustion is the most obvious indicator of burnout. When describing the experience of being in burnout people most often refer to the experience of exhaustion. From the three dimensions of burnout, exhaustion is the most widely studied and the most thoroughly analysed, and is therefore chosen as the second variable for this study.

Burnout has a significant link to both organizational and individual outcomes. Previously most of the outcomes studied were related to job performance but today also the health outcomes have received more interest among researchers. Firstly, regarding the outcomes of burnout, the concept has been associated with various forms of withdrawal behaviour, such as absenteeism, intention to leave the job and actual turnover. On the other hand, if the person decides to stay in the job, according to Maslach et al. (2001: 406), burnout leads to lower productivity and effectiveness at work. Therefore, burnout is also related to decreased job satisfaction and reduced organizational commitment. In addition, employees experiencing burnout have a negative impact on their colleagues as well because they tend to cause personal conflicts and disturb the work of others. Moreover, burnout can also be transmitted to other employees.

For individuals, burnout has proved to be linked to various forms of substance abuse, depression, anxiety, drops in self-esteem, and overall poor physical health (Maslach et al. 2001: 406; Bakker, Demerouti & Sanz-Vergel 2014: 395-396). In addition, one claim is that people who are healthier are more capable to cope with chronic stressor, such as long

traveling days, and thus, less likely to suffer from burnout. Burnout is an individual experience and is therefore specific to the work context. (Maslach et al. 2001: 406.)

As cited by Hakanen et al. (2008: 226), the growing evidence supports the positive link between burnout and ill-health. In addition, high job demands or lack of resources are proved to increase the level of burnout. Moreover, burnout may predict depression among employees (Hakanen et al. 2008: 236). Maslach et al. (2001: 407) state that burnout is a response to overload caused by quantitative job demands. Experienced workload and time pressure are firmly and consistently related to burnout, and especially to the exhaustion dimension. Excessive rush and workload increase the demands of work and may lead to ethical crises and many stress symptoms (Wallin 2010: 273).

Regarding IBTs, especially work load and pressure related to travel as job demands have been found to contribute to exhaustion and thus, to burnout. Employees rating their employer's supportive HR practices higher experienced less job exhaustion when there was a high destination risk present than those rating their employer's supportive HR practices lower (Mäkelä & Kinnunen 2016: 16). However, Mäkelä et al. (2015: 184) state that previous studies have shown that the level of emotional exhaustion, is not very high among IBTs. They also indicate that the level of burnout may vary in different phases of a single trip and that the process is different among genders. Also, Westman et al. (2004) showed, although using a small sample size, that females experienced slightly higher burnout levels than men. Nevertheless, since IBTs encounter high job demands at their work they are also at greater risk to feel exhausted if they are not provided with high level of resources.

Considering IBTs working environment it is possible that employees traveling for work may experience burnout more easily than local employees and because of its critical individual and organizational outcomes it is important to study the linkage between long traveling days and burnout.

Hypothesis H2_a: High number of traveling days has a positive effect on the exhaustion of IBT.

2.4. The effect of LMX on exhaustion and traveling days on vigor

Studies have found that also IBTs may experience simultaneously both negative and positive experiences regarding their work (Rantanen, Kinnunen, Mauno, & Tement, 2013: 22; Mäkelä 2016). For instance, IBTs' job challenge their personal life but at the same time offer good opportunities to fulfil the needs in working life (Mäkelä 2016). Even then, sometimes a job resource might turn into a job demand.

Moreover, there is a strong evidence that a lack of social support is linked to burnout. A lack of feedback, a lack of autonomy in work, and not being able to participate in decision making also correlate with burnout (Maslach et al. 2001: 407). Therefore, supervisor support and especially high LMX may have an impact on the experienced level of burnout among IBTs.

However, Jiang, Law & Sun (2014: 240) suggested high LMX to have another kind of an affect on followers. In general, high-LMX followers perceive that their leaders expect more from them, although the expectations may not be clear. This leads to high-LMX followers, compared with low-LMX followers, to be more likely exhausted from perceived higher job demands. Although high-LMX followers usually receive more job resources than other followers in the same group, according to the authors, job resources cannot buffer the stress caused by high job demands if the demands continue to burst.

According to the same study, low LMX, on the other hand, is influenced by low job resources, which in turn leads to cynicism of the followers. However, because the leader is the more powerful party and therefore has stronger influence in the LMX development process, the leader's characteristics play a significant role in how followers experience burnout. Low-integrity leaders care more about their own goals and put less attention to follower's benefits, which may intentionally or unintentionally lead to higher expectations on high-LMX followers to fulfil personal needs of the leader. Thus, high-LMX followers face psychological challenges if supervised by low-integrity leaders. Leader with high integrity, on the other hand, can prevent high-LMX subordinates from being severely exhausted (Jiang et al. 2014: 230; 242-243).

The possible dark side of high LMX was also argued by Harris and Kacmar (2006). They showed that the relationship between LMX and stress is curvilinear, meaning that

employees in high-quality relationships experience more stress than employees in moderate-quality relationships. These findings emphasize the importance of job resources, as high challenge demands (so called “good” demands that promote the employee’s personal growth and achievement) together with job resources create an optimal work conditions for employees to succeed (Tuckey et al. 2012: 25); in other words, to be engaged in their work and thus prevent them from experiencing stress (Breevaart et al. 2014: 765). In addition, researchers have found that subordinates reported less burnout when their supervisors provided a greater amount of consideration behaviors and less structure, meaning greater autonomy (Thomas & Lankau 2009: 419).

Despite the contradicting findings about high quality LMX having positive effect on exhaustion, this study proposes that lack of good LMX is linked to the health impairment process and that good leader-subordinate relationships decrease exhaustion.

Hypothesis H1_b: Good leader-member exchange has a negative effect on the exhaustion of IBT.

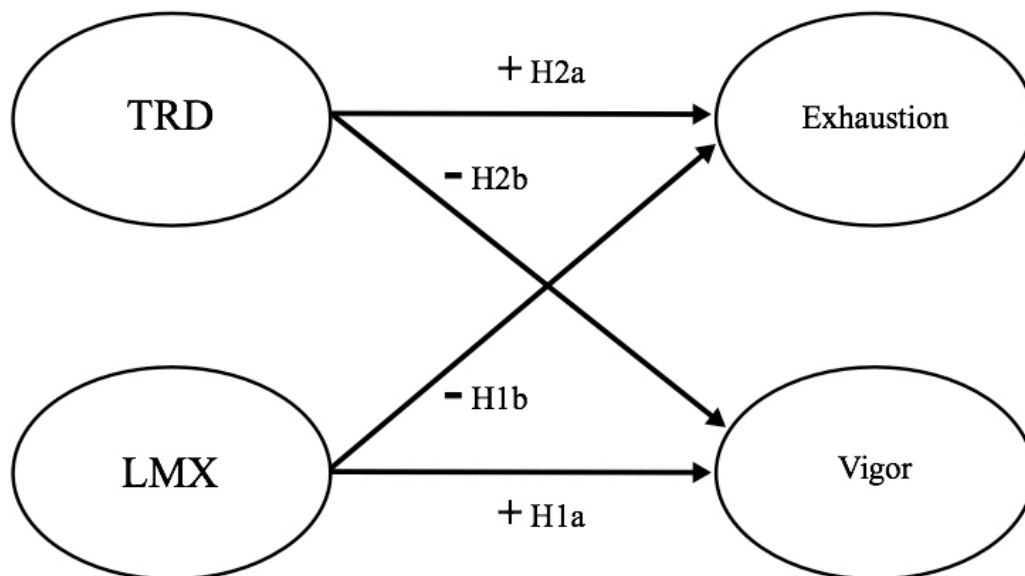


Figure 3. Hypotheses of the study.

Furthermore, continuous stress and lack of resources may influence how employees experience work engagement (Hakanen 2009). Considering IBTs' work, which is often characterized by many stressors and may lack of various resources, it is possible to presume that IBTs' experience of work engagement may suffer from the workload derived from the nature of the work. Therefore, also the link between long traveling days and work engagement is tested in this thesis.

Hypothesis H2_b: Long traveling days have a negative effect on the vigor of IBT.

3. METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

Deductive research approach was chosen for this master's thesis, meaning that the base for the study is formed through existing theory and then continued with hypotheses and empirical testing. Given the research questions and objectives, explanatory study seems the most appropriate for this case. Explanatory study refers to research, which is examining what is happening and then clarifying understanding of the problem (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009: 41; 139).

Method of the thesis is mono method research. Mono method indicates research that is using only a single data collection technique and corresponding analysis procedures (Saunders et al. 2009: 151). This study is executed by using quantitative research method and survey was chosen as the research strategy.

Data used in the study is collected from a larger research process conducted by the University of Vaasa. Thus, this thesis focuses on reanalysing a part of that data, which was collected for a study examining international business travelers' psychological well-being. By using the data from an existing research there is an opportunity to utilize a far larger sample compared to the one, which would be collected only for this thesis. The data was gathered by using measures and scales that are stabilized by previous research and thus, bringing more reliability to this research.

Although, for the sake of cause-and-effect relationship information a longitudinal study would be more reliable, a cross-sectional study is selected for this thesis because of time and resources limitations.

3.1. Quantitative research method

Generally, business studies have been divided into qualitative and quantitative research methods. Both qualitative and quantitative methods may be used when examining social phenomena. Qualitative research measures non-numeric data, or in other words data that has not been quantified. It uses a variety of empirical material, such as case study,

personal experience, life story, interviews, visual text etc. (Saunders et al. 2009: 106; 480.)

Quantitative research, on the other hand, can be referred to as hypothesis-testing research, which means that the research starts with statements of theory from which research hypotheses are formed. Second, an experimental design is established and the variables concerned (the dependent variables) are tested while controlling for the effects of selected independent variables. The subjects are selected at random in order to reduce error and to cancel bias. (Jha: 47-48.)

Quantitative data in its raw form has little meaning to most people. It needs to be processed and converted into information in order to be useful. Quantitative analysis techniques, such as statistics, charts and graphs enable us to explore, present, describe and study trends and relationships regarding the data. Usually, business research includes some numerical data that could be quantified in order to answer the research question. (Saunders et al. 2009: 414.)

Quantitative data can be divided into two groups; categorical and numerical. Categorical data indicates data, in which the values cannot be measured numerically but have to be classified into sets (categories) according to the characteristics that describe the variable concerned in rank order. (Saunders et al. 2009: 417.)

3.2. Survey strategy and the data of the thesis

Survey was chosen as the research strategy of this thesis. Survey strategy is usually combined with the deductive approach and it is a popular and commonly used strategy in business and management research. One reason for its popularity is that it allows collection of large amount of data from a substantial population and it is also low-cost. Surveys are often conducted by questionnaires after which the data is standardized and can then be easily compared. They are often perceived as authoritative by people in general and the idea behind them is relatively easy to explain and understand. In addition, the data collected by a survey can be utilized to suggest possible reasons for particular relationships between variables and to create models of these relationships. (Saunders et al. 2009: 144.) Thus, survey fits well to the research question in hand.

Survey strategy usually brings more control over the research process and when sampling, meaning taking a subset from the statistical population that represents the whole population, is used, it is possible to generate findings that represent the whole population at a lower cost than collecting data for the whole population. Moreover, data collected by a survey is unlikely to be as wide-ranging as data collected by other strategies because of the limited number of questions in the survey. (Saunders et al. 2009: 144.)

The data of this thesis (N=436) was collected in May 2015 with a web-based questionnaire. All the participants are employed by a Finnish software and services company, which operates in multiple countries and employs over 13,000 experts. The headquarter is located in Helsinki, Finland.

The survey received 436 responses, and 77.7% of the respondents were men and 22.3% women. Gender was measured as a binary variable, where 1 = male and 0 = female (Figure 4.).

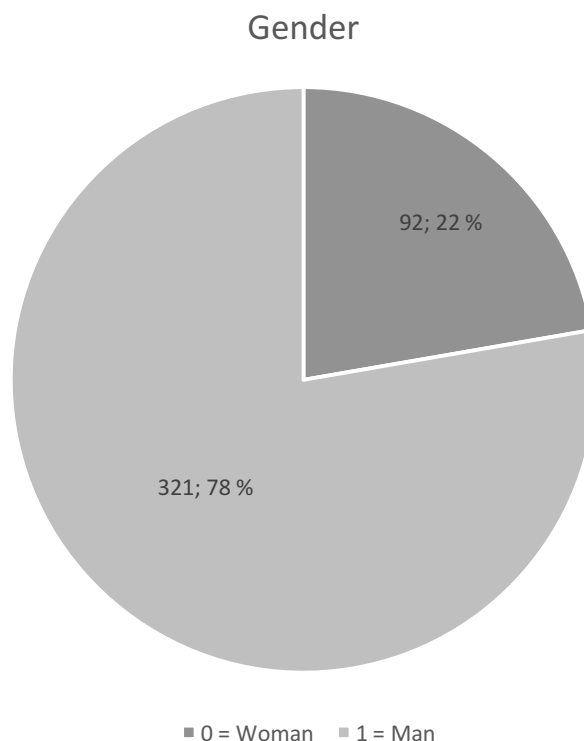


Figure 4. Gender distribution.

Altogether 21 nationalities participated. 17.1% of the respondents were single, 5.7% in a relationship but living in different addresses and 77.2% were either married or cohabiting. 38.9% had no children and 61.1% had either one or more. Age of the respondents ranged from 24 to 67, when mean was 40.30, median 40 and standard deviation 9.49.

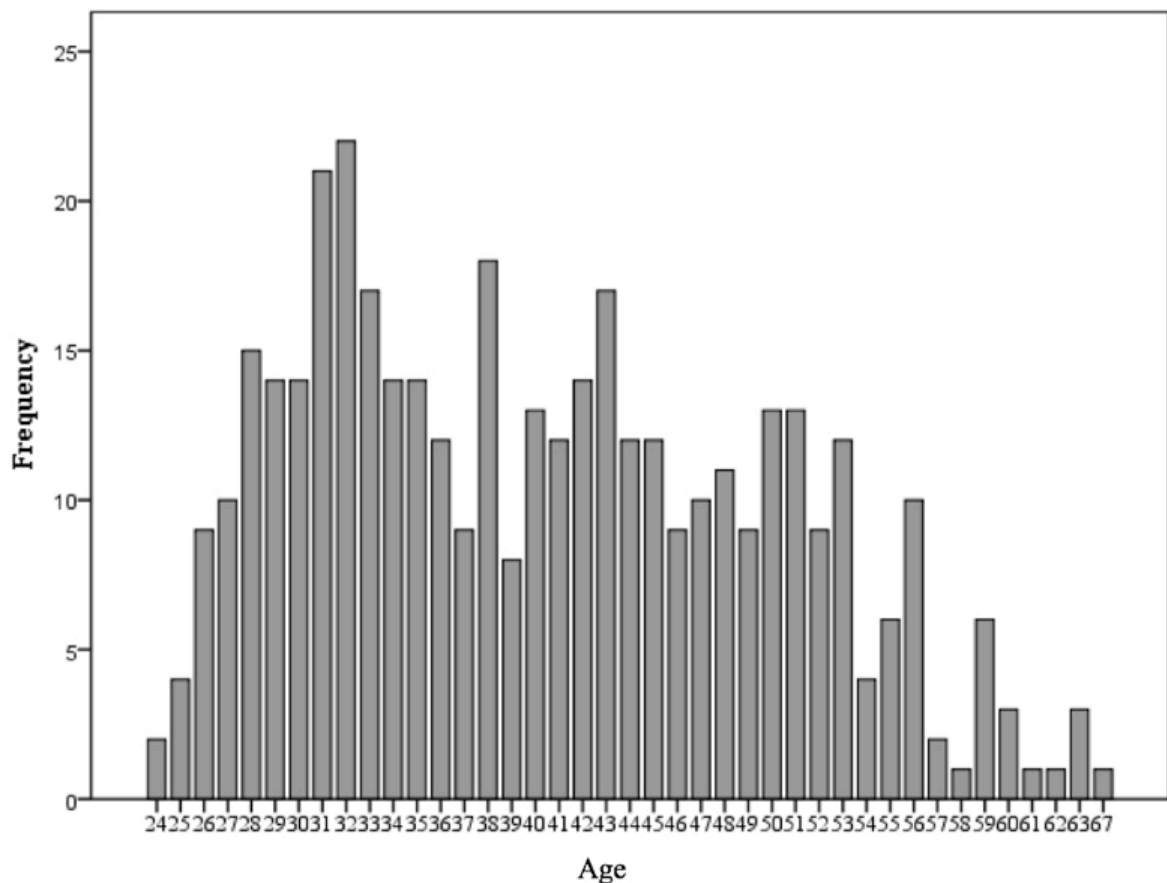


Figure 5. Age distribution.

Travel days varied from 1 to 300, as mean was 27.57, median 16 and standard deviation 32.09. Utilizing independent samples t-test it was found that men IBTs were traveling more than women IBTs, while the mean of travel days for women was 19.72 (Std. Deviation = 16.84, $n = 89$), whereas the mean of travel days for men was 29.78 (Std. Deviation = 34.83, $n = 303$). The difference of 10.06 travel days was statistically significant with $t(306.86) = -3.75$, $p = .000$, Sig. (2-tailed).

In addition, one-way anova was used to examine if IBTs of different age were traveling differently. However, the results showed that when comparing age groups of ≤ 35 , $36 - 50$ and ≥ 51 it seemed that the age did not affect the frequency of IBTs business trips but the mean for all of the groups was around 28 days. Thus, all IBTs, regardless of their age, were traveling to the same degree.

Independent samples t-test was also used to measure whether there was any difference in the frequency of traveling days between IBTs, who were higher in the relative hierarchical level in the organization and IBTs, who were lower in the relative hierarchical level in the organization. The results showed that for IBTs, whose relative hierarchical level in the organization was ≥ 5 , mean of traveling days was 25 (Std. Deviation 32, $n = 294$), while for IBTs, whose relative hierarchical level in the organization was < 5 , the mean was 35 (Std. Deviation 34, $n = 98$). The difference between the two groups proofed to be statistically significant $t(159.48) = -2.65$, $p = .01$, Sig. (2-tailed), and thus, IBTs, who are lower in the relative hierarchical level, travel more frequently than IBTs, who are higher in the relative hierarchical level in the organization.

Finally, one-way anova was used to study if there was any difference in the level of LMX when the travel days differed accordingly: ≤ 25 travel days, $26 - 50$ travel days and ≥ 51 travel days. Nevertheless, according to the one-way anova test, there was no statistically significant difference between these three groups and the level of LMX kept around the same level varying from 4.18 to 4.39 (Figure 6.).

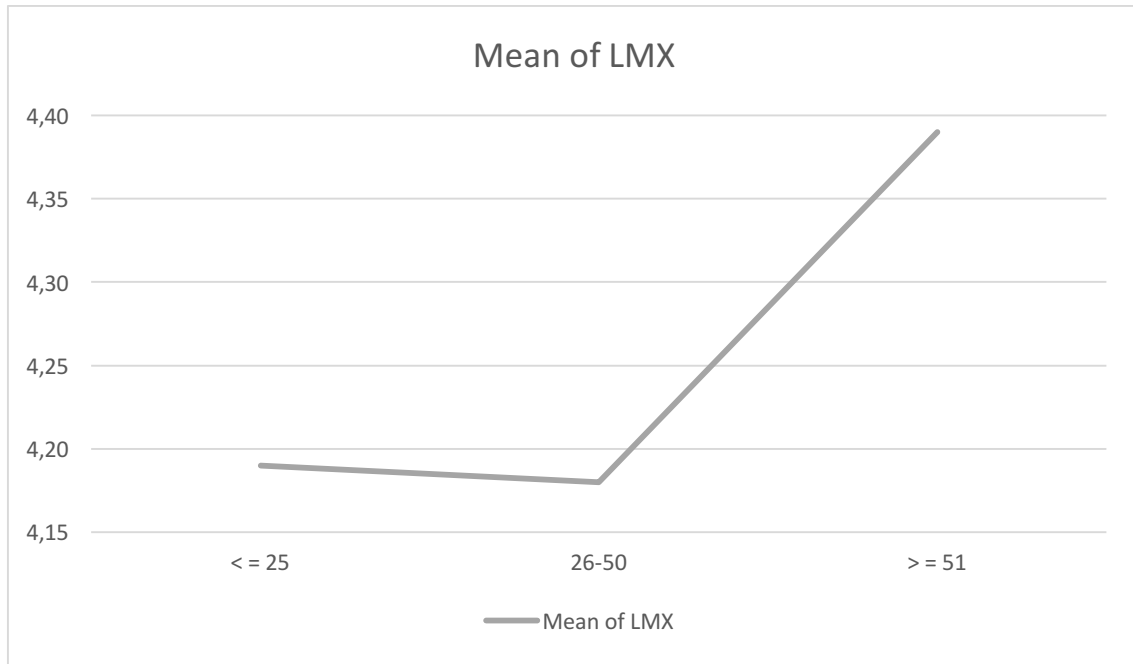


Figure 6. The level of LMX compared to travel days.

3.3. Measures

Cronbach's alpha indicates the consistency of a multiple item scale and is typically used together with Likert-type items. It is widely used in the social science literature because it delivers a measure of reliability, which can be obtained from just one testing session and during the study. The received alpha should be above 0.70, in order to guarantee the reliability of the scale. (Leech, Barrett & Morgan 2008: 46-50.) In this study acceptable Cronbach alpha coefficients were obtained on every scale, varying from 0.77 to 0.95.

LMX was chosen as a job resource for this study and it was measured with a scale consistent of eight items; "I get along well with my immediate supervisor", "Our cooperation advances both of us in performing in work", etc. The items were scored on a five-point scale anchored with never (1) and always (5). The Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.95.

Since travelling days are already in a numeric scale they were not converted into any other form but examined as they are. No reliability test was needed in this case.

Exhaustion, describing the proposed outcome of high job demands (travel days in this matter) and health impairment, was measured with a scale consistent of three items; “I am snowed under with work”, etc. Items were selected from the Bergen Burnout Inventory (BBI-15) (Terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos 2014). These items were scored on a six-point scale anchored with never (1) and all the time (6) and the Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was 0.77.

To reflect the motivational process and the well-being of business travellers, vigor was examined with a scale consistent of three items as well as exhaustion; “When on a business trip, I feel bursting with energy”, etc. The items were selected from the nine-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale and rated on a seven-point frequency-based scale anchored with never (0) and daily (6) (Seppälä, Mauno, Feldt, Hakanen, Kinnunen, Tolvanen & Schaufeli 2009). The Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was 0.87.

3.4. Procedure of the study

Descriptive analysis of the study is made with IBM SPSS Statistics 24. Firstly, correlation analysis is used to examine if there is a relationship between LMX and occupational well-being (vigor and exhaustion) of business travellers, and if there is a relationship between travelling days and occupational well-being (vigor and exhaustion) of business travellers. Correlation coefficient enables to measure the strength of the linear relationship between two ranked or numerical variables (Saunders et al. 2009: 459-460) and therefore it is coherent with the research question and objectives.

In addition, regression coefficient is then used to broaden the knowledge and to study the presumed dependence between the LMX and the business travellers’ well-being, and between the travelling days and the business travellers’ well-being. Regression coefficient enables *“to asses the strength of relationship between a numerical dependent variable and one or more numerical independent variables”* (Saunders et al. 2009: 461). Thus, the independent variables of this research are LMX and travelling days, and the dependent variables are vigour and exhaustion.

3.5. Credibility of research

Saunders et al. (2009: 156) state that because it is impossible to know whether the results gained through research are truly right or wrong, the only thing one can do in order to improve the credibility of the research is to reduce the possibility of getting the results wrong. Thus, the attention has to be paid particularly to two features of the research: reliability and validity.

Reliability refers to the degree to which the data collection techniques or analysis procedures result in consistent findings. It can be measured by three questions: “1. Will the measures yield the same results on other occasions? 2. Will similar observations be reached by other observers? 3. Is there transparency in how sense was made from the raw data?” (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson & Lowe 2008:109.)

Saunders et al. (2009: 156-157) cite that there may be four threats to reliability. Firstly, subject or participant error refers to error that occurs when subjects of the study give differing answers on different times. For example, when examining enthusiasm towards work employees are likely to give differing answers on different days of the week. Secondly, subject or participant bias refers to a situation when interviewees are answering what they think there are expected to answer. This could happen when studying satisfaction at work place, for example. Employees are then answering what they think their bosses want them to answer. Thus, anonymity of respondents should be guaranteed. The third thread to reliability is called observer error. It means that the person conducting the interviews is influencing the answers, and lastly, observer bias refers to a situation when the researcher is influencing the interpretation of the replies.

Validity, on the other hand, is measuring whether the findings are really what they appear to be about. Saunders et al. (2009: 157) demonstrate this with an example of a casual relationship between two variables. Their study found that in an electronic factory employees’ failure to look at new product displays was not caused by employees’ apathy but by lack of opportunity since the displays were located in a rarely visited part of the factory.

Saunders et al. (2009: 157-158) also present six threats to validity. Firstly, history may have an effect on the results of today’s research. Secondly, testing may be affected by

researchers if they think the results influence them somehow. Third, if there are changes in the instruments, observers or scores also the outcomes may change. In addition, mortality refers to loss of subject, which means that some participants may not complete the test until the end, and maturity means that other events during the study may have an effect on the test results. The last threat is ambiguity about causal direction, which refers to a situation when it is not known whether the examined variable is causing the effect on the dependent variable or the other way around.

In order to ameliorate reliability and validity of the research, business traveller's age (in years), gender (man/woman) and relative hierarchical level in the organization (in a scale of 1-10) are determined as control variables. From all the demographic variables that have been examined, age is the one that has most often been related to burnout. Younger employees report higher levels of burnout than those over 30 or 40 years old. Maslach et al. (2001: 401) link age to work experience and thus burnout seems to be more of a risk earlier in an employee's career. However, the impact of age on work engagement has not gained much of a proof. In addition, sex has not been a very strong predictor of burnout. Some studies argue higher burnout for women, some report higher scores for men. Similarly, no unequivocal link between sex and engagement has been found. Hierarchical level in the organization, on the other hand, is a good predictor of the level of responsibilities and complexity of the job. Thus, it may be presumed that job duties of employees at higher organizational levels are likely to involve more uncertainty (Jawahr, Stone, Kisamore 2007: 151) and thereby lead more likely to burnout than those job duties that are at lower organizational level. Therefore, it may be assumed that also work engagement might decrease when the hierarchical level in the organization increases.

In addition to reliability and validity, also external validity has to be concerned when conducting a research. This means that the research results should be generalizable, that is to say, the findings should be equally applicable to other research settings (Saunders et al. 2009: 158).

This research utilized a wide range of data. Both men and women, different ages, nationalities and different social statuses along with relative hierarchical level were examined. Thus, it may be presumed that the reliability of the results is high and corresponds accurately to the real world. In addition, the variable scales of LMX,

exhaustion and vigor were measured by Cronbach's alpha and the adequate level was received with all of them. The three control variables facilitated the constant research environment and thus, clarified the relationship between the four other variables that were the focus of this study.

4. RESULTS

As presumed, the data was in line with previous research about LMX and occupational well-being and confirmed that the two variables are linked in the context of IBTs, as well. Also, traveling days are related to IBT's occupational well-being but according to the results they only affect the level of burnout but not the level of work engagement.

4.1. Descriptive results and preliminary analyses

Means and standard deviations can be seen in Table 1. Mean level of exhaustion, in the scale varying from 1 to 6, was 3.14 (Std. Deviation 1.03, $n = 417$), whereas for the level of vigor mean, in the scale varying from 0 to 6, was 5.43 (Std. Deviation 1.12, $n = 414$). Mean age of respondents was 40.3 (Std. Deviation 9.5, $n = 407$) and mean relative hierarchical level was 5.95, which is slightly over the midpoint of the scale. Mean traveling days per year was 27.57 (Std. Deviation 32.09, $n = 414$) and mean level of LMX, in the scale varying from 1 to 5, was 4.18 (Std. Deviation 0.73, $n = 417$).

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of the study variables.

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Exhaustion	3.1383	1.03488	417
Vigor	5.4328	1.12022	414
Age	40.2973	9.49371	407
Gender	.7772	.41660	413
My relative hierarchical level in the organization	5.95	2.130	412
IBT_travel_days	27.5664	32.09235	414
LMX	4.1863	.72942	417

Table 2. Correlations between the study variables (N = 436).

	Exhaustion	Vigor	Age	Gender	My relative hierarchical level in the organization	IBT_travel_days	LMX
1. Exhaustion	1						
2. Vigor	-.107*	1					
3. Age	.116*	.060	1				
4. Gender	-.043	-.122*	.032	1			
5. My relative hierarchical level in the organization	-.144**	-.179**	-.142**	.133**	1		
6. IBT_travel_days	.147**	.069	-.022	.132**	-.131**	1	
7. LMX	-.134**	.344**	.036	-.024	-.082	.012	1

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlations between study variables are shown in Table 2. The correlation analysis revealed that there is statistically significant correlation between LMX and business travellers' well-being and between traveling days and business traveller's well-being. Firstly, the correlation results showed that LMX as a job resource was positively related to vigor ($\beta = .344, p < .000$). Second, LMX was negatively related to exhaustion ($\beta = -.134, p < .01$), as expected. Thus, when LMX increases so does the vigor of IBTs, along with decreasing exhaustion.

Furthermore, traveling days proved to positively correlate to exhaustion ($\beta = .147, p < .01$) but had no correlation to vigor. Therefore, it may be said that when the frequency of business trips increases, also exhaustion grows. However, the frequency of business trips has no effect on IBTs' vigor.

Also, the control variables had correlations to vigor and exhaustion. Respondent's age was positively associated with exhaustion ($p < .05$) indicating that when IBTs age the possibility of feeling exhausted increases. In addition, gender correlated negatively to vigor ($p < .05$), which means that according to these findings men IBTs were more likely to feel vigorous than women IBTs. Moreover, the relative hierarchical level in the organization had negative correlations to both vigor ($p < .00$) and exhaustion ($p < .01$), referring to decrease in vigor and in exhaustion when relative hierarchical level increases.

4.2. Testing the hypotheses

Next, the hypotheses H1_a through H2_b were tested with regression coefficient with the following procedure: in step 1 control variables were entered to control for their effect, the frequency of traveling days was entered in step 2 and finally, LMX was entered in step 3.

By examining the regression coefficient (Table 3.), it can be seen that vigor of IBTs was mostly explained by high LMX. Therefore, IBTs with high LMX generally have higher levels of vigor, as well. Thus, H1_a was supported. But also, low hierarchical level explained a part of the experienced vigor and IBTs with lower relative hierarchical level in the organization seem to have higher levels of vigor. In addition, according to the

results, gender had a minor effect on IBTs' vigor, too. As there have been contradicting findings about the influence of gender on occupational well-being, this is a concept that could also been studied further, although the results are suggestive.

However, as showed in Table 2. and 3. the traveling days did not seem to have any influence on IBT's vigor and therefore H2_b was not supported.

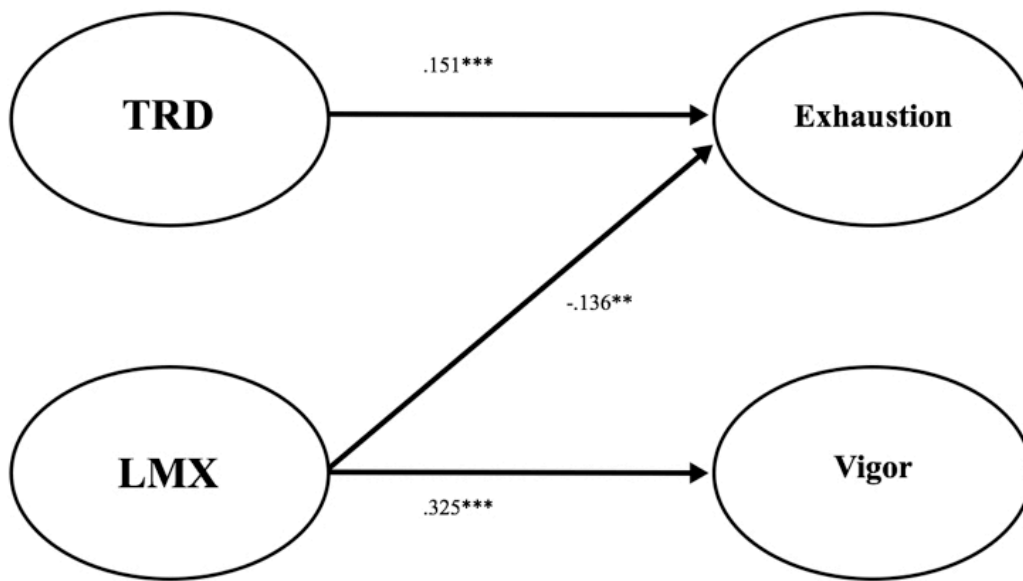


Figure 7. Results of regression coefficients.

Table 3. Regression Analyses for Vigor and Exhaustion.

Independent variables	Vigor (n = 355)			Exhaustion (n = 358)		
	β	ΔR^2	Adjusted R^2	β	ΔR^2	Adjusted R^2
<i>Step 1: Controls</i>		0.049**	0.040**		0.036**	0.028**
My relative hierarchical level in the organization	-.180**			-.152**		
Gender	-.098			-.017		
Age	.031			.092		
<i>Step 2: Effect of travel days</i>		0.003	0.040**		0.022**	0.048***
My relative hierarchical level in the organization	-.171**			-.127*		
Gender	-.106*			-.040		
Age	.034			.100		
IBT_travel_days	.53			.151**		
<i>Step 3: Effect of LMX</i>		0.105***	0.144***		0.018**	0.063***
My relative hierarchical level in the organization	-.141**			-.140**		
Gender	-.101*			-.043		
Age	.030			.102		
IBT_travel_days	.057			.150**		
LMX	.325***			-.136**		

Note: β = standardized beta-coefficient from the final step, ΔR^2 = change in explanation rate in each step, Adjusted R^2 = explanation rate.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

The results of regression coefficients also revealed that the variance in exhaustion is dependent on LMX and therefore, the H1_b was supported. As seen in the Table 3., IBTs with high quality relationship with their supervisor experience lower levels of exhaustion. Moreover, travel days influenced the experienced exhaustion of IBTs and generally, when the number of traveling days' increases, so does IBT's exhaustion. Thus, also the hypothesis H2_a was supported.

The relative hierarchical level in the organization seems to have an effect on IBTs' exhaustion, as well. When the relative hierarchical level, in other words responsibility, increases, exhaustion grows. Furthermore, the findings of regression coefficient showed that IBTs age and exhaustion had a positive relationship with a significance level of $p < 0.1$. The results suggest that when IBT's age increases so does exhaustion. Even though the results are suggestive, this is something that could be studied further in the future. However, the IBT's age did not affect IBT's experienced vigor.

All the results of regression coefficients can be seen in Figure 7.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This thesis examined the impact of LMX as job resource and travel days as job demand on occupational well-being (vigor as a core component of work engagement and job exhaustion as a core component of burnout) among IBTs. The theoretical framework of the thesis was based on the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti 2007: 313), which examines both the motivational and the health impairment processes. To the best of the author's knowledge, the concept in this setting has not been under research earlier.

5.1. Findings related to motivational process and health impairment process

The study showed that high quality LMX relationship is directly linked to vigor. This finding is in line with the motivational processes of the JD-R model. That is, when the LMX relationship between supervisor and IBT subordinate is at high quality level, the vigor of the IBT increases, and the other way around. In addition, LMX is negatively related to job exhaustion, supporting the motivational process of the JD-R model. Consequently, if the LMX relationship is at high quality level, the exhaustion of the IBT subordinate decreases.

These findings support most of the previous studies examining LMX and occupational well-being (Erdogan & Enders 2007; Basu & Green 1997; Liden et al. 2006; Harris et al. 2005; Breevaart et al. 2012: 765). Although, some research suggests that high quality LMX relationship might cause exhaustion to subordinate employees (Jiang et al. 2014: 240), this study asserts that high quality LMX rather serves as job resource for IBTs, and thus, emphasizes that organizations should concentrate on observing the LMX relationships within the company. As job resources, and especially LMX, are contributing to the motivational process of the JD-R model and therefore, the work engagement of IBTs, managers leading frequently traveling employees should be aware of the motivational process and how it can affect IBTs' well-being and thus, the whole company.

On the other hand, the study proofed that high number of traveling days had an effect on exhaustion, which supports the concept of health impairment process. The results are in line with earlier research studying the impact of traveling days to psychological well-being (Mäkelä & Kinnunen 2016: 4; Burkholder et al. 2010). This thesis supports the fact that high frequency of international business travel days correlate positively to exhaustion, and thus, contributes negatively to IBTs occupational well-being,

However, contrary to expectations, high number of traveling days was not related to IBTs' vigor. According to the findings of this study, even though IBTs are spending many days per year on overseas business trips, their vigor does not seem to decrease. This finding is not in line with the JD-R model and the health impairment process, which suggests that job demands contribute to the ill-health process. It is possible that this is due to the findings of earlier literature that suggests that international business trips might offer IBTs an escape from daily routines (Westman & Etzion 2002), or give them a possibility to fulfil the needs in working life (Mäkelä 2016). For example, one contradicting study (Westman & Etzion 2002) found that business trips have an ameliorative effect on IBTs psychological health. It suggests that a business trip overseas might be an attractive break from routine, which gives the employee an opportunity for a detachment from one's regular environment, which in turn may alleviate stress and burnout.

Nevertheless, according to the same study (Westman & Etzion 2002), high level of burnout was still present prior the travel even though the trip itself offered a welcoming break from the routine. This may be because of the time limit, the need to finish a lot of work before leaving and the need to prepare material for the trip itself. In addition, ambiguity and anticipation of difficulties while trying to adjust the work in different location and culture without the support of a supervisor, colleagues and family were mentioned in this research as potential influencers to the pre-trip strain. In any case, it is important to remember that since the high number of traveling days seems to be related to exhaustion of IBTs, organizations operating in a global scale should observe the well-being and the exhaustion level of their employees. Also, the health impairment process should be fully understood in the context of IBTs.

What was interesting in the findings was that the relative hierarchical level in the organization seems to have an effect of a sort on both IBTs' vigor and exhaustion. The results suggest that low relative hierarchical level in the organization increases vigor and simultaneously, decreases exhaustion, and the other way around regarding high relative hierarchical level in the organization. The link between the relative hierarchical level and vigor/exhaustion is something that could be studied further in the future in order to get more insight to the question about IBTs' occupational well-being.

5.2. Practical implications

For a start, organizations should enable managers and IBT subordinates to create high quality LMX relationships that would support the IBT with his/her work. For example, all managers should be trained to understand the complex nature of IBTs' work and how they can facilitate it with their own behaviour and leadership style. Generally, the concept of LMX and its possible outcomes should be realized by all management. LMX is linked to many organizational and individual outcomes (Mäkelä et al. 2013: 16-17), such as turnover intentions, overall work satisfaction, job performance, etc. (Dulebohn et al. 2011: 3), and as it is possible to influence these outcomes with LMX, it is crucial for both the organization and the managers to know how to utilize this tool with its full potential.

In order to improve the LMX relationship between the supervisor and IBT, feedback training could be offered for both of the parties. Feedback fosters learning and thus, increases job competence, which in turn enhances well-being (Bakker & Demerouti 2007: 314). By training all the employees of the organization, IBTs would be better prepared for their tasks and communication with their supervisor would be more constructive and less counterproductive. Also, different leadership trainings could help managers to lead their subordinates in a proper and needed manner.

The IBT and his/her supervisor should be able to trust each other in order to build a high quality LMX relationship. IBTs and their supervisors could implement novel meeting procedures to their work, which would be less formal and would enable them both to get to know the other party better. Thus, trust would increase and furthermore, the supervisor

would know more accurately how he/she should lead the IBT, since everyone is an individual and reacts differently to different leadership styles (Dulebohn et al. 2011: 26).

The supervisor and the IBT should also clarify the goals and targets of the IBT's work so that they both have similar understanding of the situation and how it should be tackled. Thus, role ambiguity and misunderstandings could be avoided. This could also be done visually, by using so called treasure mapping method (Salonen 2005: 138), which means creating a physical representation or collage of what is wanted to be achieved. The collage then serves as an active reminder of the goals and creates a continuous and mutual agreement on the goals and important targets.

In addition, Mäkelä (2016) argues that organizations should also take into consideration the internal career orientation toward internationalism while recruiting for a job that includes international business traveling. This is due to findings that support that IBTs with a stronger individual career orientation to internationalism experience higher work-to-life enrichment, and that strong internationalism lowers the negative relationship between the number of business trips and work-to-family conflict. This is something that should be noted when recruiting new IBTs. If the person-job fit is not working, also the well-being of the employee is in danger.

Different policies and practices, which support IBTs' in balancing their work and personal life, should be established by the employer. Flexibility at work and also outside international business trips is crucial for the sake of the employee and thus, remote work and flexitime holidays, for example, should be enabled by the organization. As work-family balance has proofed to be an important factor affecting IBTs' well-being (Mäkelä et al. 2015: 191), employees should be encouraged to maintain and nurture their social relationships also outside of work.

As Westaman & Etzion (2002) stated how burnout occurred often before the international business travel, organizations and the manager should help the IBT to organize and prepare for the travel. Thus, the experienced work overload and the ambiguity that cause exhaustion among IBTs, would decrease. In addition, it may be that if the manager is paying attention towards the IBT's work and is seemingly helping him/her to get through the work, also the LMX relationship between the supervisor and the traveling employee

could develop. Regular one-to-one reviews with the manager, measuring the work load of the IBT, would likely benefit both the employee and the employer.

Also, IBTs themselves should be trained to measure their own well-being. By increasing self-knowledge IBTs could observe their own condition and the levels of exhaustion, for example. This way individuals could prevent exhaustion and over-commitment, which has proofed to be harmful for psychological well-being (Mäkelä et al. 2015: 192). If the workload feels overwhelming or too stressful, employees should be encouraged to ask for help or for downsizing the workload. This is also why the relationship between the manager and the IBT should be at high level. If the traveling individual feels that he/she cannot ask for help from the supervisor, it does nothing to be self-knowledgeable about one's own well-being.

In the hectic environment, in which IBTs operate, it may be difficult to put time on relaxation but according to some studies (Salonen 2005: 134) mental images and visualization exercises might support well-being, as well. This could work well with IBTs, who relatively seldom have time to actually walk in the nature or do other kind of relaxation exercises that are found to increase the feeling of control, acceptance and balance, for instance. For example, IBTs could utilize mindfulness practices during and before their international business trips in order to reduce their experienced exhaustion. In literature mindfulness is defined as intentional awareness of the present moment without any judgement, and mindfulness practices have been demonstrated to reduce burnout and stress among professions that work under increasing stress (Goodman & Schorling 2012). Thus, mindfulness could serve well IBTs, who experience stress and exhaustion on their business trips. However, since people are different by nature, it is important for the sake of the individual and also for the sake of the organization to clarify, which methods that increase well-being, work in once' own case.

In general, assessing the psychological well-being of IBTs is important. Regular controls measuring burnout and work engagement, and other variables related to occupational well-being, could be a good practical manner to increase the knowledge of the current state of employees' well-being. This way organizations could step in early enough, before the situation with exhaustion and health impairment process increases, and eventually leads to burnout, prolonged sick leaves, turnover, and so on. In addition, by controlling

the well-being of employees, the organization gives staff members a good impression of a care-taking and concerning employer. This in turn may reduce turnover intentions.

5.3. Limitations of the study

This study, as every empirical study, has some limitations, which should be noted.

Firstly, there is a thread of ambiguity about causal direction in this research. The study was carried out as cross-sectional, meaning that no reliable cause-and-effect relationship information can be concluded. Thus, it could be possible that IBTs' experienced vigor is causing high quality LMX relationships, and that IBTs' exhaustion is causing low quality LMX relationships. Similarly, IBTs' exhaustion might lead to IBTs staying longer on their business trips if they think they are not accomplishing enough results during the trip, for example. Longitudinal studies would be needed in order to examine the casual direction between LMX and vigor/exhaustion and between travel days and exhaustion.

Also, although sample size was relatively extensive, more research with larger sample sizes is needed. Larger sample sizes make the results more generalizable since the population is better represented. In addition, qualitative studies should be made in order to get differing perspective to the subject. Qualitative research may bring more deepening information to the research on IBTs' occupational well-being, while it also allows open questions and more detailed interviews.

Moreover, the data was collected by questionnaires based on self reports, and therefore the results might be affected by participant error and participant bias. Since there were no limits to day and time when respondents were answering the questionnaire it could be that some results would have differed if done at different time of the day, for example. If the IBT was just about to leave for a long business trip he/she might have experienced more exhaustion than if just gotten back from the trip. Furthermore, as the study was asking questions related to IBT's supervisor and work satisfaction, he/she could have bend the truth in order to avoid conflict with the supervisor or with the organization, although the anonymity of the respondent was guaranteed. Also, even though the questionnaire was kept simple and straight-forward it still might be that the respondents

were interpreting some questions differently and thus, giving differing answers. It is also in the human nature not to be fully able to assess oneself introspectively. People are relatively often seeing themselves in a different light to how others see them and therefore, IBTs in this study might have given extravagant or dismissive answers.

5.4. Conclusion

To conclude, this thesis provided complementary information to previous research examining the effects of LMX and traveling days on occupational well-being. The results showed that high quality LMX relationships increase vigor and thus, work engagement of employees, whereas low quality LMX relationships increase exhaustion, which might eventually lead to burnout. Similarly, high number of traveling days was found to elevate exhaustion. The Job Demands-Resources model gained support in the context of international business travel. Lastly, some possible research subjects that could bring more insight to the context of IBTs' occupational well-being, are presented.

Firstly, Bakker and Demerouti (2007: 314) state in their study of the JD-R model that the interaction between job resources and job demands influence the development of job strains and motivation. It is proposed that job resources may buffer the effect of job demands on job strains, burnout being included (Bakker, Demerouti & Verbeke 2004: 89). Depending on the characteristics of the specific job in hand, the job resources and job demands may differ in different organizations. Different types of job demands and job resources may interact in predicting job strain (Bakker & Demerouti 2007: 314). Thus, the interaction effect of LMX and traveling days should also be studied in order to better understand their influence on IBTs. Due to the findings of this study, it may be presumed that LMX is buffering the effect of long traveling days that are causing burnout for business travellers. If this hypothesis is supported by this study, organizations should start paying even more attention to the relationships between their leaders and subordinates.

Also, social support is said to be the most well known situational variable potentially buffering against job strains (Haines, Hurlbert & Zimmer 1991). Since LMX is strongly linked to social interaction and may serve as job resource when the link between leader

and subordinate is supportive, it is possible that good LMX also buffers against job strains and especially against burnout. In addition, Bakker and Demerouti (2007: 315) suggest that high quality relationships between supervisors and employees put job demands in another perspective and may alleviate the affect of job demands on job strains. Appreciation and support from the leader may help the employee in coping with the job demands and simultaneously, job resources influence motivation or work engagement when job demands are high. More precisely, job resources are said to gain their full potential particularly when employees have to face high job demands. (Bakker and Demerouti 2007: 315.)

Second, due to the seemingly contradicting findings on IBTs burnout the possible mediating variables should be identified and one promising mediating variable could be the person-occupation fit, as Westman & Etzion (2002) state. Also Mäkelä (2016) has discovered parallel findings that support the person-occupation fit as a mediating variable. Therefore, this mediating variable should be examined in order to get more information about IBTs' burnout, its development process and possible prevention.

In addition, while the results of this study accidentally found that the relative hierarchical level in the organization affects both the work engagement and burnout of IBTs, it could be interesting to examine the concept further. It can be presumed that IBTs who are higher in the organization suffer more from stress and other job demands, since they have more responsibility and supposedly work longer hours as well. Thus, high quality LMX as job resource could also serve IBTs who are higher at the relative organizational level in the organization. This is important to study, while the supervisor of an IBT, whose organizational level is high, might quite often be located overseas, which creates novel difficulties to the relationship between the IBT and his/her supervisor.

Finally, as mindfulness and other relaxation exercises have gathered a lot of attention recently (Risanen 2015; Tommola 2015), it would be interesting and worthwhile to study their possible influence among IBTs, as well. It may be that regularly done mindfulness practices could prevent exhaustion and burnout, and help IBTs to cope with the job demands characterizing their work.

Overall, when thinking about IBTs, their important role in organizations and the complex environment in which they operate, it can be concluded that if organizations and the managers take into account the opportunities and possibilities that LMX has to offer, and simultaneously control the travel days and well-being of IBTs, both employers and employees benefit over time.

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